



## Abdominal Explore Surgery

An abdominal explore, or laparotomy, is a general term for any surgery where we are entering the abdominal cavity. This type of surgery is most often performed for foreign body removal, internal tumors, trauma repair, stone removal, or to obtain biopsies of internal organs. Typically, abdominal x-rays or an abdominal ultrasound have been performed to give us more information on what to expect prior to performing surgery. However, these tests have limitations, and the surgery itself is also a diagnostic tool to give us more information.

### **Abdominal Explore Procedure**

Your pet will be placed under general anesthesia. Using sterile surgical techniques, a long incision will be made on your pet's belly to allow access to the abdominal organs. During an explore, every abdominal organ will be examined to identify abnormalities.

Abnormalities will be surgically corrected, if possible, and biopsies of internal organs may be taken to assist in diagnosis. Your veterinarian will discuss with you ahead of time the expected outcome, prognosis, and post-operative hospitalization and care expected. This discussion will be to the best of your veterinarian's ability. However, the findings of the exploratory surgery itself may alter, sometimes drastically, these outcomes.

### **Complications**

**Anesthesia:** Abdominal explores are often performed on animals who are sick. Therefore, your pet may have increased risks for anesthesia. However, your pet will have had fluids and other medications or diagnostics to decrease this risk as much as possible.

**Incision:** Swelling, bruising, infection and dehiscence (opening of stitches) are a possible complication. These can be minimized by keeping your pet strictly rested and keeping the incision clean during the recovery period. If your pet allows, you can also ice there incision for 10 minutes twice daily for the first three days following surgery, then move to warm compressing for 10 minutes twice daily for the remainder of the recovery period.

**Outcome cannot be guaranteed:** There are times when the abdominal explore uncovers cancer that cannot be removed or trauma/disease that is beyond surgical repair. In some cases, your veterinarian may call during surgery to discuss other options including end of life decisions.

**Infection:** Internal infection is an uncommon complication of intestinal/abdominal surgery. This can occur in the first 5 days of the surgery if the internal incisions (such as incisions in the intestines) fail to heal properly. Signs of this may include vomiting, lack of appetite, lethargy, or fever and should be reported immediately.

### **Recovery and Homecare**

If your pet had a major surgery performed, your veterinarian may recommend that they be transferred to PETS Hospital for 24 hour care until they are ready to go home. Your veterinarian may discuss this prior to surgery, if transfer is expected, or may discuss this after surgery if unforeseen complications occur.

After your pet's abdominal surgery, they will need to be confined in the home or crate and taken out on a leash for bathroom breaks only for 2 weeks to allow the incision and the internal organ areas to heal. Your pet will also require a cone during that time to prevent licking and self-trauma to the incision site. You may ice the incision area twice daily for 10 minutes for the first 48 hours after surgery to decrease swelling. After 48 hours, a warm compress can be applied to the areas twice daily for 10 minutes to remove any swelling that occurred.

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